

February 1, 2012

Senate Natural Resources, Environment and Great Lakes Committee
Michigan State Capitol
Lansing, MI 48933

Re: SB 0078

Dear Committee members:

SB 0078 proposes to prevent Michigan's public land managers from using the most up to date scientific knowledge about Michigan's habitats and ecosystems to manage and restore the lands that belong to all the people of Michigan. This legislation would hurt our state's wildlife and natural resources, will diminish the value of Michigan's public lands in the future, and will send Michigan back generations as our professional natural resources staff are banned from using their training, current science and experience to manage Michigan's public lands.

Banning the use of current scientific knowledge by Michigan's land managers is particularly disturbing because our state has more to lose than almost any place else. There are more different kinds of habitat and ecosystems here than any place in the lower 48 states outside of the Pacific Northwest. Our state's rivers, forests, wildlife openings and other habitats are just beginning now to recover fully from the era of the lumberjack and land clearing for farming at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries. Michigan's northern lower peninsula and Upper Peninsula were left in poverty as the forests and fisheries that had provided so much wealth were no longer able to provide furs, wood, or other products above subsistence levels. Much of Michigan's once astonishing forestlands became known as "the lands that no one wanted" and reverted to public ownership as timber companies moved west and farmers were unable to scratch out a living on the depleted soils.



*Destruction of forests in the UP has taken decades to repair.
Kingston Plains near Grand Marais. MI State Archives photo*

The conservation movement began in the upper Great Lakes region as enlightened leaders in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota started to use science to begin to restore the forests and other habitats that had been destroyed. As scientific understanding has expanded, through research by Michigan institutions and others around the country and the world, the understanding that restoring healthy, sustainable natural resources depends on using the best current information has continued to grow. Biological diversity is the foundation upon which all of our natural resources rest. It is a combination of disciplines that takes into account all of the components that affect habitat, from geology to climate to water. If this legislation had been in place, Michigan's natural resources managers would have barred from the restoring the moose and elk herds because they had been eliminated previously. Restoration of habitat is critical for future natural resource users, whether they are loggers, mushroom pickers, anglers or hunters, because only healthy habitat can provide ongoing benefits to people.

In the past several years, volunteer teams of experts and stakeholders from the full range of users of these lands have assisted the Department of Natural Resources in putting together information to inform planning processes for Michigan State Forests. Decisions about how that information will be used will be shaped by public input, which is what should happen with management of our public forests. Blocking consideration of this important information and prohibiting decisions based on the scientific information gathered is short sighted at best, potentially threatening the recovery and proper management of Michigan's valuable natural resources.



MICHIGAN CHAPTER

SB 0078 proposes to block the use of some of the most important information that has been gathered and to prevent our professional agency staff from using their judgment about what the proper mix of management is on these publicly owned lands. SB 0078 undermines the principles of sound natural resource management that Michigan has used to restore habitat used today by millions of people. We urge a NO vote on SB 0078.

Sincerely,

Anne Woiwode
State Director
Sierra Club Michigan Chapter